EXTREME OVERHAUL: SOME NOTES

YOUNGBLOOD

After JUDGEMENT DAY, the Government pull the plug on Youngblood's finances and, effectively, the team is disbanded. Sentinel is imprisoned at Supreme's Citadel in the Hell of Mirrors for the murder of Riptide. Knightsabre has gone back to Australia in disgust at how his former team-mates had been willing to assume his guilt. Badrock quits super-heroing to concentrate on a career in the media. The Katellans go back into space, and piece by piece, by the time Judgement Day is concluded, the entire team has gone. Only Shaft remains with a feeling of being cheated out of something he'd worked to build. He feels it shouldn't have ended like this.

After the Riptide murder trial, however, Shaft is approached by William "Waxey" Doyle, active during the 'forties as the superhero Waxman, but since retired from crime fighting to become a billionaire in the furniture polish business. Since he still sometimes gets a hankering to contribute to his old career in some way, he offers Shaft the use of a mansion that he no longer uses (probably the mansion that had his famous headquarters "The House of Wax" somewhere beneath it), so that Shaft can use it as a base of operations around which to construct a new Youngblood, a team which Doyle is willing to finance. He might also be able to help finding members for the new group, since he still keeps in contact with some of his old friends. His one proviso is that space be found in the group for his adopted son Max, who has always wanted to be a superhero. Although more that slightly dubious about this last part, Shaft feels he can't look a gift horse in the mouth, and accepts Waxman's offer. All this, more or less, by the end of JUDGEMENT DAY.

The first issue of The New Youngblood will introduce the various new team members, recounting how they came to join the team, and will also feature them in a brief but intense battle with a villain who is to become a major nemesis for the group. This follows the formula of some of the Lee and Kirby books...notably the X-Men, with its use of Magneto in the first issue, setting up a conflict that will last as long as the series does, on and off. We may start in the middle of a pitched battle with the villain, and fill in the way the characters came to be working together and fighting him by the use of flashback sequences, a variation on the technique Marv Wolfman and George Perez used to relaunch the New Teen Titans. Before I get on to the details of the first issue, however, I'd better run through my thinking on the restructuring of both the book and the Youngblood team into something at once new and at the same time "classic", whatever that means in a field that produced Brother Power, the Geek.

Firstly, I think the team should be designed as a smaller and sleeker unit. Six members is the upper limit, I think, and that's the number I'm going to go for. If you have more characters than that, the action gets cluttered and it becomes increasingly difficult for the writer and artist to establish each character as a real and solid person in their own right. It's like schooling: in a class with six kids, each child will receive a lot more attention and thus get on a lot better than in a classroom with thirty kids.

Secondly, while the current trend for the inclusion of female superheroes for their stroke-book value has produced some regrettable excesses, you'd have to be pretty stupid not to accept that sex appeal is a large factor in today's comic book marketplace, and indeed perhaps always has been, though in less overt ways. There's nothing wrong with giving comic books a strong element of sex appeal, so long as its handled right: not so emotion-drenched that it turns into soap opera; so single-mindedly carnal that it turns into the XXX-Women or one of the Eros super-porn titles; so blatant that it undermines the other qualities of the book in question.

Another problem with Suprema is that she is almost infinitely powerful. This means that if Suprema tells you she doesn't like bad language and rudeness, it's probably best not to give her the finger or ask her what the fuck it is to her. Suprema is awesome and sexy, but I think that she'll also be very funny (albeit unconsciously) and also sometimes almost touchingly decent. I'm thinking about the way they used to handle the right wing S.W.A.T. team commander in *Hill Street Blues*: he was the butt of most of the jokes because of his pompous attitude, but every once in a while the writers gave you a sense that there was something oddly touching about the guy's determination to stick to this absurd and outdated moral code. I figure that has some similarities with the way that Suprema could work in the new Youngblood. Of course, her inclusion in the team also opens the possibility for utilising the Supreme continuity for story ideas at some point in the future, which probably isn't a bad thing, and would provide an easy rationale for any crossover involving Supreme.

TWILIGHT, the teenaged accomplice to Professor Night, is the other female-young-sidekick in the new team. A shorter and more boyish haircut and a modified eighties costume that I've already discussed with Rick will make her very sexy without violating the essential look of the character. The star-shaped mask is traded in for similarly-shaped eye make-up, for example, and the lace-up jerkin mutates into something that's more like a bustiere or corset. Power wise, she is only an ordinary human being with extremely advanced athletic skill, co-ordination abilities and combat capacity..or at least she is after sunset. During the day, she sleeps most of the time. What is most useful about Twilight, however, is her powerful and incisive mind, including her highly advanced Detective skills. She is serious and hard working, and her leadership abilities are such that Shaft may even worry about his own position, although Twilight has no ambitions in that area. She is also obviously much more mature, knowing and sexually aware than Suprema, although there is no hint of her ever having had a boyfriend, and no explanation as to where she acquired her attractive sense of worldliness. She keeps her private life very much to herself, and sometimes gives the impression, ever so slightly, that there is room for no other man in her life except her uncle and mentor, Professor Night.

This is perhaps a good example of how I'd like to treat a lot of the sexuality in the new Extreme Universe : leave most of it to the feverish minds of our adolescent audience. We set up parameters in which the sexual imagination can run amok, and yet never show or say anything that isn't entirely innocent and in keeping with a fun superhero comic. This is something far more subtle than innuendo: it is more like forcing the reader to dwell on the subject in their thoughts by avoiding it altogether and making it conspicuous by its absence. We never suggest that Twilight and her uncle, Professor Night, have been sleeping together for a while and have a passionate romantic and sexual relationship, but then we never suggest that they're *not*. As an example, I see Twilight as the female member of Youngblood that Shaft is most likely to develop feelings for. This would probably start as sheer admiration for her professional skill, and then turn into a real personal attraction when they were thrown together by their work in the field. Shaft, however, will get nowhere with Twilight, and will never really understand why. If she's got another boyfriend or if she's gay or something, then why doesn't she just tell him? But Twilight says nothing. Her life is her business. I'll be returning to this theme of the subtle but hopefully powerful and affecting treatment of sex in the Extreme Universe later, when we get to *Glory*, but this should give you some preliminary ideas as to how I'm thinking.

Twilight will provide a level of depth and experience to the team that even Shaft simply doesn't have. This kid was battling monsters from other worlds, arresting criminal

lunatics like the Jack-A-Dandy and getting to hang out with Supreme by the time she was *eight* for God's sake. She is tough, kind, sensitive and sensible, and she's also very lovely.

The two other male members of Youngblood alongside Shaft are both new to the Extreme Universe, and are indeed probably the first two completely contemporary new '90s characters that I've introduced to the continuity.

JOHNNY PANIC is a truly postmodern teenage superhero who, if he were at another company, would probably get his own Vertigo title where he could say "fuck" and, like, do it. And have a beer. As luck would have it, however, he's stuck in a team with someone like Suprema, who Johnny refers to as "the flying nun". Johnny Panic is basically an eighteen year old scientific genius with a warped sense of humour and an attitude problem. Also, interestingly, he was born to parents where the father was infertile by the agency of a sperm bank. With his parents since divorced, Johnny has been living with his mother, who has finally reached her wit's end with the brilliant but troublesome youngster, and, at the urging of her expensive child psychiatrist, tries to foist him off onto Youngblood as their responsibility.

Johnny, although semi-delinquent, is a very useful and fascinating young man. His innate scientific genius seems to know no bounds, although his interests tend towards the general interests of his generation: Music. Drugs. Computers and cyberpunk; stuff like that. This has led Johnny to some interesting discoveries. He has a self-invented hologram suit, which conceals lots of little lenses and reflectors in the trimmings and is capable of creating an image of more or less whatever Johnny has available in the image bank of his smart-clothes, wherever Johnny wants it. His suit is also wired into the Net, so that he has the capacity for totally virtual adventures that take place completely in cyberspace. Another aspect of the character is one that hooks him in to what they call " the chemical generation" without removing him from the field of traditional classic comic book powers and abilities.

If you think back to characters like D.C's HOURMAN with his "miraclo" pills, it's evident that there are a lot of superheroes who've traditionally gained their powers by chemical means. In Johnny Panic's case, he has completely invented a whole range of designer drugs that do different things, not for sale or profit but purely for his personal use. Some drugs he would use on himself...drugs to speed up his reflexes, drugs to temporarily increase his intelligence or endurance or whatever. Other drugs might be more aggressively used, against other people: truth serums used on villains, for example, or knockout drugs to avoid anything vulgar like fist-fighting. Sometimes these may have peculiar side effects that would perhaps provide either comic relief when needed or even a springboard for an entire story. (I have an idea, for example, of Johnny Panic suddenly gaining a kid or even an animal superhero partner that only he can see or talk to, a side-effect rather than a sidekick.) These are just possibilities, but I think that with the visual opportunities alone that are open for the character....which I see as possibly being a '90s updating of the experimental visuals that Steranko used to employ back in the '60s.... would make him a valuable member of the team.

Another thing about Johnny that won't be found out until much later is that he is the son of Darius Dax, the anonymous sperm donor whose frozen sample the bank provided to Johnny's mother. This obviously has plot possibilities, not least pertaining to Twilight and Suprema, both of whom fought Dax back in the sixties. Also, without wishing to spoil things for you, even after we see him become the Supremium meteorite that gave Supreme his power in issue 52 of Supreme, Darius Dax will still turn out to be alive as a human being in the current continuity. This is all connected to a sort of Anti-Supremacy called DAXIA that I haven't told you about yet, but rest assured

that Dax will be around in the future for a possibly powerful father-son reunion with Johnny, who, incidentally, takes his name from a Sylvia Plath short story. How Vertigo can you get?

BIG BROTHER is the final male member of them team. His real name is Max Doyle. He's Waxman's adopted son; he's seventeen; he's black; he's only about five feet tall, and he's crippled in both legs. Though not without a certain mordant humour, Max is somebody with a lot of pain and bitterness and hurt in him. His interest is robotics, and, once he'd been adopted by the wealthy and generous Waxy Doyle and his wife, he suddenly had the money to put his ideas into action, designing the robot (or actually, as it will turn out, series of robots) that goes by the name *BIG BROTHER*. ..

The basic, everyday-use model of Big Brother is a sort of twenty-feet tall Transformer type robot that Max has a sealed cabin in the chest of, from which he monitors the outside world with screens and directs his giant mechanical body with a joypad. It has heavy firepower and can do all sorts of cool stuff. Then, for bigger jobs, there's a sky-scraper sized model with huge searchlights for eyes. There is also a submarine model, and a model that acts as a space-shuttle or interstellar space ship, big enough to have cabins for the other Youngblood members built into it. This solves the problem of giving the team a distinctive mode of transport: Big Brother IS their mode of transport, their Fantasticar and their Avengers Quinjet rolled into one. Also, it doesn't hurt to think about merchandising possibilities, even at this early stage.

Big Brother will take a while to function smoothly with the rest of the team. In his super-powered role at least, Max has put himself in a shell, and part of the unfolding story in Youngblood will be how he's drawn out of it. Oddly enough, I see Max as being the only possible love interest for Suprema out of the current team, but it would take a long time for them to get over their initial dislike of each other. For one thing, both of them are the two members who provide the team's raw power, despite their radical differences. All the same, I think it could be a relationship with a lot of sparks and pathos, if handled properly. Maybe he's even the first man she sleeps with, and after that they have a great and loving relationship for about eight months after which he, with difficulty, leaves her for another woman, and then we could do a whole issue about what Suprema does when her boyfriend dumps her. I'm sure you get the idea. If it was kept powerful enough and paced right, there's no need for it ever to degenerate to soap opera or smutty innuendo. It's about getting the balance right, between absurdity and pathos, comedy and drama, sex and sincerity, stuff like that.

DOC ROCKET is the final member of the team, but this is not the now sixty-five year old Doc Rocket who used to be one of the original Allied Supermen of America. Instead, this is his grand-daughter, who is sixteen and has inherited his super-speed powers, along with some of her grandmother The Alleycat's sassy approach to life. I see this new Doc Rocket as being very likeable and very much a fun character, with far fewer personality problems or hang-ups than the other members. How tragic can it be being the fastest girl in the world?

Also, visually and story-wise, I'd like to play more with the possibilities of super-speed characters than has been done in the past. Does anybody else remember how Carmine Infantino used to very often suggest the Flash's super speed by showing everything else as if it were frozen or seen in slow motion? Then of course there are multiple exposure effects by which we can evoke anything from the beautiful action sequences of photographers like Muybridge to something like Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase", along with lots of other novel visual effects that I haven't thought of yet. Let's give this book a range of innovative visual spectacle unseen since the

psychedelic heyday of the middle sixties. We certainly have better technology to do it now, so why not invest some imagination as well and make this superhero team book really *memorable*?

Doc Rocket will be the most normal character on the team, and probably one of the strongest points of reader identification. She'll probably be the female member that female readers like best and the male readers are most likely to get a genuine crush on, rather than just leer over. Also, with an interesting family background, there are springboards for stories that might be useful in the future.

Anyway, speaking of that future, I'd probably better get on with giving you my preliminary brief sketches of the first year of continuity for the new Youngblood:

ISSUE ONE, as mentioned above, details the formation of the new team, intercut with the introduction of the character that will become their Magneto or Dr. Doom. This is a character called *THUNDERHEAD*, and he is a mutant who somehow has the weather system wherever he happens to be tied up to his emotional balance. The weather will respond to his emotional directives, with effects like those seen in that *Twister* movie recently, or with snowstorms or heatwaves or earthquakes or whatever. At the end of the first issue he will be temporarily beaten or driven off, having provided the new team with their baptism of fire.

ISSUE TWO features another one-off self contained story with a new villain called *THE OCCUPANT*, who can basically occupy the body of any single living organism and take over its mind and actions. This leads to obvious problems when it takes over the body of Suprema. Again, by the end of the issue, I want the story resolved and the villain either neutralised or imprisoned somewhere. These one-off issues will keep the storyline nice and tight, and give us time to start to develop the characters of the team members properly, along with supporting characters like Waxey Doyle, who I think might provide some amusing and gentle comic relief in his role as a retired Golden Age hero who was pretty useless in the first place.

ISSUE THREE is the first part of a rare two-part story. I want the two part stories to be in a minority, and to only use two issues if we genuinely have a story that warrants that much space because of its scale or whatever. Otherwise, we keep the stories self contained in one issue. In this issue and in *ISSUE FOUR*, we have Youngblood take their first mission into deep space when they go the aid of the Katellans, whose civilisation is threatened by the approach of something called *THE GOAT* . The Goat is something much worse on the register of cosmic threats than something like Galactus. What The Goat is a gigantic machine, built somewhere far away in the Universe, in the remote past, by a race who longer even exist as legends. The Goat is a Nano-Machine of the kind envisioned by Eric Drexler, but on a vast scale. What it does is to consume raw materials which it breaks down using nano-technology into component atoms and then rebuilds as something useful, much like a goat turning grass into milk. The thing is, this thing is big enough to munch its way though entire solar systems, since its creators wanted something that could furnish them with every luxury they could imagine, on a planetary scale, which it did until at one point it ate them too. It's been eating its way across the Universe ever since. It isn't even intelligent. Unlike Galactus, you can't argue with it or philosophise with it or even talk to it. The only options are to get out of its way or get digested. This should provide a couple of issues of thrills for our heroes and the Katellans, along with possible guest shots by new Extreme space heroes like Spacehunter and Janet Planet.

ISSUE FIVE is another one off story in which we introduce another major character and adversary, this being a hero/villain in the early Submariner mold, the main difference being that what the Submariner was to water and fishes, this character, named *CROW*

JOHN, is to air and birds. His birth was the result of crossbreeding between a human mountaineer and a beautiful winged female from a lost race of bird-people who live atop Earth's tallest and most inaccessible peaks. He hates humanity for what they have done to the bird kingdom and the atmosphere and you can probably imagine the rest, except I'll make it more interesting. He can fly, and has control over all birds, which he can also talk to. He also is able to summon supposedly mythical birds like The Roc or the Garuda, much as the Submariner could summon mythical sea creatures upon occasion. He'll be a proud, arrogant and yet undeniably sympathetic character who we'll doubtless be using again in future, along with his entire Avian race of bird people.

ISSUE SIX features Youngblood against an older, more sinister, fresh-out-of-retirement version of Professor Night's arch enemy, the *JACK-A-DANDY*, probably through the Twilight connection; and will end with the villain's defeat, capture and confinement until he escapes from the asylum next time.

ISSUE SEVEN gives us a one-off light relief story in which a fairly major adversary of the original Youngblood team comes to attack the new Team only to find that they are all either convalescing from injuries sustained during the battle with Jack-a-Dandy, or happen to be elsewhere. In a tale which will incidentally give us a complete tour of the Youngblood's new mansion headquarters, we will see Waxy Doyle forced to temporarily come out of retirement as Waxman and repel the intruder with only the awesome power of wax at his disposal.

ISSUE EIGHT presents a story in which we bring together to two premier teenage teams of the new Extreme Universe as Youngblood meet and probably battle The League of Infinity (shown as fully realised 1990s characters, rather than as the period-piece pastiches that they were shown as in their Supreme flashback) in a trans-time story that might also have cameo appearances from some of the historical characters that we introduce in JUDGEMENT DAY. Since Suprema is a member of both teams, there should be an easy way to set up a natural connection between the two groups.

ISSUE NINE features the return of *THUNDERHEAD*, only this time he has taken the precaution of assembling a team of young evil counterparts to his Youngblood adversaries, these being a so-called "hypergang" called *BADBLOOD*. Instead of Suprema, Badblood have *SATANA*. Instead of Doc Rocket that have the daughter of an old Glory foe from the fifties, who, like her mother, is called *SPINNING JENNY*. Instead of Big Brother they have a kid who controls an entire army of deadly toy planes, tanks, men and battleships, this being *TOY SOLDIER*. Instead of Twilight they have the eternally youthful Professor Night foe *FAKEFACE*, and instead of Johnny Panic there's a state-shifting teenage alien boy who can turn to glass or sand or crystal, and who is known as the *SILICONE TEEN*. Completing the line-up is a weapons oriented Shaft-counterpart called *ARENA*, who is like a cooler version of the old Daredevil foe, the Gladiator. These last three are only provisional, and I may well have thought up better ones by the time we get round to actually doing this. The issue ends with the evil team defeated and driven off, but no doubt they'll turn up again eventually.

ISSUE TEN features a Mark II version of the Allied Supermen's old power-absorbing Android foe *MAGNO*, who absorbs all of Youngblood's powers and does something nefarious using them until at the end they beat him using their natural human ingenuity and all get their powers back.

ISSUES ELEVEN AND TWELVE are another two part story: what happens is that the villain from issue two, *THE OCCUPANT*, returns. This time the person he decides to occupy is *BADROCK*. The resultant horrific rampage involves a historic first

team-up between the new Youngblood and the newly-reformed post-Judgement Day *ALLIES*, which I figure should bring our first year to a successful and suitably thrilling close.

Year Two could feature an all out war between Crow John's Avian people and the human race with Youngblood caught in the middle; an occult adventure, perhaps involving Blake Baron, occult agent, in which Maximage joins the team or perhaps becomes a reserve member; the resurrected Darius Dax comes to visit his son, Johnny Panic; Sentinel, by now escaped from Supreme's Hell of Mirrors, vows revenge upon the team that he feels he should be the leader of; Skipper, the Fisherman's sidekick, comes out of retirement to guest star; more memorable villains both "old" and new turn up; Thunderhead returns; some fluke or timewarp pits the original Youngblood against the new team, or some connection between the current Maximage and her 19th century Indian shaman predecessor Nighteagle throws the team back to the American West to handle villains of that era while Extreme's western heroes are catapulted into the present and must use their gun-slinging talents against some modern, high-tech super villain, functioning as a cowboy supergroup variant of Youngblood that we'll probably call YoungGun or something. And so on and so on. I'm sure you'll agree that the possibilities for a long run of lively and above all else fresh and imaginative stories seem very good indeed. Anyway, I'll probably make additions and amendments to this at a later date, but that will do for the time being. Next time I get a spare moment I'll knock up my notes on suggestions for GLORY and put them in some sort of coherent form. Until then, take care and I'll talk to you soon.